(54) Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CONNECTING ACCREDITED CLIENTS TO ACCREDITED AGENTS

(57) Abstract: An internet based system and method (10) for connecting accredited real estate clients (22) to accredited agents (36) is disclosed. Prospective clients and agents visit a web site (14) and apply for accreditation. Those that meet selected criteria are accredited. An accredited client (22) wishing to enter into a transaction is matched with accredited agents (36), one of whom is selected by the accredited client (22) to assist the accredited client (22) in consummating the transaction. Upon consummation of the transaction, the selected agent confers a first benefit on a referral manager (16) and the referral manager (16) confers a second benefit on the accredited client (22).

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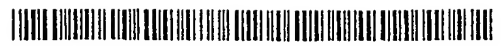
— *Before the expiration of the time limit for amending the claims and to be republished in the event of receipt of amendments.*

For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CONNECTING ACCREDITED CLIENTS TO ACCREDITED AGENTS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The invention is an internet based system for introducing accredited real estate clients to accredited real estate agents.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

A real estate agent must constantly deal with the problem of obtaining reliable and serious clients. Similarly, an individual wishing to purchase or sell a property has to deal with the problem of finding a reliable and trustworthy real estate agent.

Traditionally, the best and least expensive source for new clients for real estate agents has been referrals. These referrals often come from other real estate agents who specialize in transactions of a different type or in a different geographic area than the agent recieving the referral. A real estate agent will often confer a benefit on another agent or relocation firm who introduces them to a client, providing the referral culminates in a sale or purchase. Possible benefits include money payments, wares, services, vouchers or a promise to refer a client to the other agent or firm. To date, most individual buyers or sellers of real estate have been excluded from sharing in this benefit. The present invention makes it possible for an accredited client to locate an accredited agent and to share in the benefit.

Prior to widespread commercial use of the internet, there existed numerous online Bulletin Board Systems (BBS's) where individuals could post a message advertising a property for sale, rent or purchase. This method is still utilized by agents, buyers and sellers who post messages to usenet newsgroups. This method does not, however, connect a seller or buyer with an accredited real estate agent. This method of selling is the electronic version of placing a classified advertisement in a newspaper, albeit a very widely distributed newspaper. There is no assurance of the credibility of the advertiser

and the advertiser has no assurance of the credibility of the individuals who may respond.

An internet site (www.coreferral.com) provides a matching service for referrals, but only for the state of Colorado. The site
5   provides a fixed rate cash incentive range depending on the total value of the real estate transaction. There is no cost to the buyer or seller for registering. As the incentive is capped and there is no facility for out of state referrals, the site is quite limited in scope.

Another internet site (www.brokerfind.com) provides
10   referrals to agents within the U.S. only. Two plans are provided for the prospective client. The first plan is free and provides for free gifts such as a street atlas upon signing up. Upon completing a transaction, other free gifts are available, such as a six month membership to a pre-paid legal plan which includes a number of free legal services such as
15   will preparation and toll free telephone support for a six month period. The second plan requires the user to pay a registration fee to obtain a cash incentive, further the cash incentive is capped at $1000.

Another internet site (www.homegain.com) matches buyers or sellers (i.e. clients) with real estate agents. However, it does not
20   return any benefit or incentive to the client nor does it receive a referral fee from the real estate agent. It does, however, require a registration fee from each agent.

The inventors believe that the present invention provides for an efficient means of matching real estate clients with real estate
25   agents. Clients are screened to ensure credibility and agents are screened to ensure they are top quality. Neither the client nor the agent pays a fee to register with the service. Thus, the present invention provides, via the internet, a means for introducing accredited real estate clients to an accredited real estate agent. The
30   screening of clients and agent is carried out by a referral manager, who also introduces accredited clients to accredited agents. Should an

introduction result in a purchase, sale, lease, or other business arrangement, the agent confers a benefit on a referral manager, who then confers a benefit on the client.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In a first aspect, the present invention provides an internet based method for connecting an accredited client and a retained agent, said accredited client intending to enter into a transaction with a third party, said retained agent introducing said accredited client to said third party to consummate said transaction, the method comprising the steps of: a) providing a website accessible to a prospective client and a plurality of prospective agents; b) accrediting said prospective client based upon a first accreditation process, said first accreditation process converting said prospective client to said accredited client; c) accrediting each of said prospective agents based upon a second accreditation process, said second accreditation process converting each of said prospective agents into an accredited agent; d) matching said accredited client with a set of accredited agents; e) informing said accredited client of said set of accredited agents; f) informing each of said accredited agent in said set of accredited agents of said accredited client; and g) said accredited client selecting said retained agent from said set of accredited agents.

In a second aspect, the present invention provides a method for selling or purchasing wares or services via the internet, said method comprising the steps of: a) establishing an internet web site accessible to agents and clients; b) accrediting an agent; c) accrediting a client; d) repeating steps b) and c) for each agent or client to be accredited; e) matching an accredited agent to an accredited client; and f) sharing of a benefit provided by said agent, between said client and a referral manger should said matching result in a sale or purchase.

In a third aspect, the present method provides a computer

based method for connecting a client with an agent, said client wishing to arrange a transaction, said agent wishing to introduce said client to a third party, said third party wishing to enter into said transaction with said client, the method comprising the steps of: a) accrediting said

5   client, if said client does not become an accredited client, the method does not proceed; b) selecting a set of referred agents from a database of accredited agents; c) notifying said set of referred agents and said accredited client of said transaction; d) contacting said set of agents and said accredited client to ascertain which agent in said set of agents is a

10   retained agent; e) monitoring the status of said transaction until said transaction is completed.

In a fourth aspect, the present invention provides a computer based system for introducing an accredited client to a plurality of accredited agents, said system comprising: a) a database comprising a

15   plurality of accredited agents b) means for allowing an accredited client to submit a transaction; c) matching means for selecting from said database of said plurality of accredited agents a set of interested agents based on the characteristics of said transaction; d) means for notifying said accredited client of said interested agents; and e) means for

20   notifying each of said interested agents of said client and said transaction.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention will now be explained in further

25   detail, by way of example only, with reference to the drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a block diagram illustrating a preferred embodiment of an internet based referral system;

Figure 2 is a flowchart of a method of accrediting a client

30   according to the preferred embodiment of Figure 1;

Figure 3 is a flowchart of a method of accrediting an agent

according to the preferred embodiment of Figure 1; and

Figures 4A and 4B illustrate a flowchart of a method of introducing an accredited client to one or more accredited agents according to the preferred embodiment of Figure 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

A preferred embodiment of the present invention is described here in the context of a referral system for introducing a client who is interested in making a real estate transaction to a real estate agent who is competent to assist the client in completing the desired transaction.

One factor which has been considered in making the present invention is a need to ensure that a client is introduced only to agents that are known to be capable of assisting the client in completing the transaction. Similarly, it is important that an agent is only introduced to clients that are known (or at least strongly believed with good reasons) to present a valid opportunity for the agent to complete a transaction. These "quality control" measures are required to ensure that the operator of the referral system develops and maintains a reputation for providing competent and valuable referrals. All clients and agents are "accredited" prior to being considered for referral to, respectively, any agent or client.

A second factor which has been considered in making the present invention is the desire to maximize the use of the referral system by both clients and agents. As a result, in the preferred embodiment of the present invention, no fee is charged to clients or agents who wish to use the system.

Reference is first made to Figure 1, which illustrates an internet based referral system 10. Referral system 10 is operated on a computer 12 and includes a web site 14. Referral system 10 is operated by a referral manager 16 to connect an accredited client 22 to an

- 6 -

accredited agent 36. The referral manager 16 is responsible for the accreditation of accredited clients 22 and accredited agents 36 for referring them to one another.

5   Reference is next made to Figure 2, which shows a method 100 of the preferred embodiment by which a prospective client 18 may become an accredited client 22. A prospective client 18 is a person who wishes to be connected to an accredited agent 36 for assistance in completing a transaction 28 (Figure 1) with a third party 30 (Figure 1). For example, if the accredited client 18 is moving from one state to

10   another, the prospective client may wish to purchase a home in the new state. At this stage, the identity of the third party 30 is unknown. The third party 30 will be the seller of the property that the accredited client 22 eventually buys in the other state.

     Method 100 starts in step 102, in which the prospective client

15   18 visits a "client application" page (not shown) of web site 14 (Figure 1) and completes a client application form 26 (Figure 1). Client application form 26 requires prospective client 18 to provide at least the following information:

20   i.   contact information for prospective client 18, including telephone and e-mail contact information;

     ii.   a description of the transaction 28 that prospective

25   client 18 wishes to enter into, including a description of the geographic area in which the transaction 28 is to take place. This description may be a location code, such as a zip code or postal code, or the description may be more general, such as a

30   state or region of a country. The description may also include the type of property, an indication

whether the property is to be purchased or sold, the price range for the transaction and a time limit for the transaction.

5   This information is exemplary and may be varied as desired. For example, a prospective client 18 may also be required to provide personal information such as age, financial data such as income and/or ability to complete the transaction 28 or marital status. When prospective client 18 has completed client application form 26,

10   prospective client 18 submits it for review by referral manager 16 (Figure 1), typically by selecting a "Submit Client Application" control on client application form 26.

         Method 100 next proceeds to step 104, in which referral manager 16 reviews client application form 26 completed by

15   prospective client 18. If the transaction 28 described by prospective client 18 meets selected criteria, (hereinafter referred to as "transaction criteria"), then referral manager 16 contacts prospective client 18 to determine the validity of the transaction 28 proposed by prospective client 18. This contact may be made immediately after prospective

20   client 18 has submitted client application form 26 by means of an internet chat mechanism, or it may be made later by e-mail, telephone or another method. More than one method of contact may be used to determine the validity of the opportunity. To determine whether the transaction 28 is valid, referral manager may request information such

25   as the nearest major intersection to the location of the transaction 28, a description of the community in which the transaction 28 is to take place, etc.

         The term "validity" of the transaction 28 refers to the likelihood that the transaction can reasonably proceed. Various factors

30   may be relevant to determining the validity of a transaction. The factors are designed to identify nuisance prospective clients 18 who are

proposing transaction 28 that are impossible. For example, if a prospective client 28 proposes to sell a house at a street address that does not exist, referral manager may be able to determine this by using a database of valid addresses. The factors are also designed to identify

5   possible but unreasonable transactions. For example, if a prospective client 18 wishes to purchase a large house in an expensive neighbourhood for a small amount of money, then the transaction 28 is unlikely to be considered valid. The determination of the validity of a transaction is in the discretion of the referral manager 16. In the

10   preferred embodiment of the present invention, referral manager 16 will only approve a possible and reasonable transaction, in the judgment of referral manager 16, as valid.

If the transaction 28 meets the selected transaction criteria and the transaction 28 is determined to be valid, then prospective client 18

15   is classified as "accredited" and becomes an accredited client 22.

The selected transaction criteria may include factors such as a minimum value for a transaction, types of acceptable transactions (i.e. system 10 may be limited to buying and selling property and may not include leasing or renting property; alternatively, system 10 may be

20   limited to commercial property only and may not include residential property). In the preferred embodiment, referral system 10 is used for all types of real estate and for any type of transaction.

Method 100 next proceeds to decision step 106. If prospective client 18 was not classified as an accredited client 22 in step 104, then

25   method 100 proceeds to step 108, in which method 100 stops. If prospective client 18 was classified as "accredited" in step 104 and is therefore now an accredited client 22, then method 100 proceeds to step 110.

In step 110, the accredited client 22 is added to accredited client

30   registry 34. The accredited client 22 is also informed that he has been classified as "accredited".

- 9 -

Reference is next made to Figure 3, which shows a method 200 of the preferred embodiment by which a prospective agent 20 may become an accredited agent 36. A prospective agent 20 is a person who wishes to be considered for introduction to an accredited client 22.

5   Method 200 begins at step 202, in which a prospective agent 20 visits an "agent application" page (not shown) of web site 14. On the agent application page, the prospective agent 20 completes an agent application form 38 (Figure 1). On agent application form 38, prospective agent 20 is required to provide the following information:

10

    i.   identification details - contact information such as telephone number, mailing address, e-mail address;

    ii.   the service types offered by the prospective agent 20
15   (for example, residential housing, industrial real estate, rental, sales/purchases, etc.; luxury homes);

    iii.   the geographic service areas in which the prospective agent 20 is capable of providing each of
20   the identified service types.

    ii.   describe the experience and qualifications of prospective agent 20 to assist an accredited client 22 in completing a transaction in each of the identified
25   service types and service areas.

When the prospective agent 20 has completed agent application form 38, the prospective agent 20 submits it for review by referral manager 16, typically by selecting a "Submit agent application" control on agent
30   application form 38.

      Method 200 then proceeds to step 204, in which the agent

- 10 -

application form 38 submitted by the prospective agent 20 is reviewed by referral manager 16. If the service types, service areas, experience and qualifications set out by prospective agent 20 meets criteria selected by referral manager 16 (the "selected agent criteria"), then referral

5   manager 16 contacts prospective agent 20 to verify the information provided by prospective agent 20 on agent application form 38. This contact may be made by internet chat, e-mail, telephone or another method: When referral manager 16 contacts prospective agent 20, referral manager 16 may require prospective agent 20 to supply

10 additional information to substantiate claims made on agent application form 38. For example, prospective agent 20 may be required to provide certified records relating to the prospective agent's experience or to identify references that can confirm, on a subjective basis, the skills claimed by prospective agent 20.

15   If referral manager 16 determines that prospective agent 20 does possess the selected agent criteria, then the prospective agent 20 is classified as "accredited" and prospective agent 20 becomes an accredited agent 36.

    Method 200 next proceeds to decision step 206. If prospective

20 agent 20 was not classified as "accredited" in step 204, then method 200 proceeds to step 208, where it ends. If prospective agent 20 was classified as "accredited" in step 204 and is therefore now an accredited agent 36, then method 200 proceeds to step 210.

    In step 210, the accredited agent 36 is assigned an accredited

25 agent identification code and a password. The accredited agent 36 must use this accredited agent identification code and password in order to access information in method 300 (Figures 4A and 4B), described below.

    Method 200 next proceeds to step 212, in which the accredited

30 agent 36 is added to accredited agent registry 40. The record for accredited agent 36 in accredited agent registry 40 includes all of the

- 11 -

information entered by accredited agent 36 on his or her agent application form 38 and the accredited agent identification code and password assigned in step 210. Accredited client 36 is also informed that he has been classified as "accredited".

5   Methods 100 and 200 are carried out once for every prospective client 18 or prospective agent 20. A prospective client 18 or prospective agent 20 who is not accredited may apply to become accredited at a later time. Over time, the accredited client registry 34 and the accredited agent registry 40 will build up and may contain a
10   large number of accredited client and accredited agent records.

Reference is next made to Figures 4A and 4B, which show a method 300 of the preferred embodiment. Method 300 is used to connect an accredited client 22 with one or more accredited agents 36 (Figure 1). Method 300 is carried out separately for each accredited
15   client 22 (Figure 1). In the preferred embodiment, method 300 will be carried out immediately after the accredited client 22 has been added to accredited client registry 34.

Method 300 starts in step 302. In step 302, the transaction 28 (Figure 1) that the accredited client 22 (for whom method 300 is being
20   performed) wishes to carry out is compared to the service types and service areas for every accredited agent 36 that has been entered into accredited agent registry 40. Every accredited agent 36 capable of assisting accredited client 22 is classified as a "potential" agent 42 and a potential agent list 44 is made of all potential agents 42. For example, if
25   accredited client 22 wishes to sell a residential house in the 12345 zip code, then the potential agent list 44 will include every accredited agent 36 that has included sales of residential homes in his or her service types and included zip code 12345 in his or her list of geographic service areas.

30   Method 300 next proceeds to step 304. In step 304, every potential agent 42 is notified that transaction 28, which corresponds to

the service type and area of the potential agent 42, may be reviewed on web site 14. The potential agent 42 will also be advised that the potential agent 42 must review transaction 28 and indicate that the potential agent 42 wishes to be considered for referral to accredited
5   client 22 prior to a selected time. This time is selected by the referral manager 16. In the preferred embodiment, this time ranges from 1 to 10 days, depending on the time requirements of the accredited client 22, the number of potential agents 42 and other criteria.

Method 300 next proceeds to step 306, in which each potential
10   agent 42 who was notified in step 304 may visit a "transaction review" page 43 (Figure 1) of the web site. In order to view the transaction review page 43, the potential agent 42 must first visit an "agent log-on" page 45 (Figure 1) of web site 14 and enter his or her accredited agent identification code and password (assigned in step 210 of method 200).
15   The potential agent 42 is then given the option of viewing the transaction review page 43. The transaction review page 43 provides detailed information about the transaction 28. This information may include the type of property to be purchased or sold, the expectations (i.e. price, time) of the accredited client 22, the geographic region in
20   which the transaction 28 is to take place, etc, but does not include any information relating to the accredited client 22. If the potential agent 42 is interested in being introduced to the accredited client 22, the potential agent 42 selects a "Request Introduction" control on the transaction review page 43. The potential agent 42 is then classified as
25   an an "interested" agent 46, and is added to an interested agent list 48.

When step 306 is commenced, interested agent list 48 will initially be empty. During step 306, more than one potential agent 42 to whom a notification was sent in step 304 may visit the transaction review page 43 and may indicate that he or she is interested in being
30   referred to accredited client 22. Any potential agent 42 that does so is added to the interested agent list 48.

Step 306 ends when either (i) every potential agent 42 has been added to the interested agent list 48 or (ii) when the time selected in step 304 has ended.

Method 300 next proceeds to step 308, in which every interested agent 46 on the interested agent list 48 is assigned a score. This score may be based on various factors, such as (i) the history of the interested agent 46 in completing the type of transaction required by the accredited client 22; (ii) the sales performance of interested agent 46; (iii) performance rating information supplied by other accredited clients to whom the interested agent 46 has previously been referred (and which will have been stored in the record of interested agent 46 in accredited agent registry 40 when the information was received); (iv) the number of other accredited clients that have previously been referred to the interested agent 46 and other criteria. Each factor may be weighted differently in calculating the score assigned to each potential agent 46. Other criteria may also be used in calculating the score for an interested agent 46. The score assigned to each interested agent 46 is recorded in interested agent list 48.

Method 300 next proceeds to step 310, in which a referred agent list 52 is made. The referred agent list 52 includes a selected number of the interested agents 46 that were assigned the highest scores during step 308. These interested agents 46 are classified as "referred" agents 50. In general, a small number of interested agents 46, typically between two and five, will be selected to be referred agents 50. Although the inventors have selected this range for the preferred embodiment, other embodiments may select a different number of referred agents 50, depending on the characteristics of that embodiment. If the number of interested agents 46 is less than the number of interested agents 46 to be selected as referred agents 50, then all interested agents 46 may be selected as referred agents 50.

Method 300 next proceeds to step 312, in which the accredited

client 22 is introduced to each referred agent 50. In step 312, a notice is sent to the accredited client 22 identifying each referred agent 50. The notice also contains contact information for the referred agent 50 and a summary of the experience of referred agent 50. A notice is also sent to

5   each referred agent 50 identifying the accredited client 22 and giving contact information for the accredited client 22.

Method 300 next proceeds to step 314 (Figure 4B). During this step, accredited client 22 is expected to make contact with one or more referred agents 50, or vice versa, and accredited client 22 is expected to

10 enter into an agreement with one of the referred agents to retain that referred agent 50 to assist accredited client 22 in completing the transaction. In the preferred embodiment, referral manager 16 does not recommend any referred agent 50 as preferable over the others to accredited client 22. The referred agent 50 retained by accredited client

15 22 is identified as the "retained" agent 54. During step 314, referral manager 16 may make periodic contact with accredited client 22 and with retained agent 54 (and possibly the other referred agents 52) to (i) determine which referred agent 52 has been selected as the retained agent 54 and (ii) to monitor their progress in completing the

20 transaction. Step 314 ends when the transaction 28 (i.e. the sale or purchase identified by the accredited client 22) has been completed.

Method 300 next proceeds to step 316. In this step, retained agent 54 confers a first benefit (not shown) on referral manager 16 for referring accredited client 22 to retained agent 54. The first benefit may

25 be in various forms. For example, it may be a money payment, vouchers for free or discounted wares or services or a transfer of some right or interest. The value of the first benefit may be calculated based on the value of transaction 28. For example, it may be calculated on a fixed or sliding scale as a percentage of the value of transaction 28.

30 Method 300 next proceeds to step 318, in which referral manager 16 confers a second benefit on accredited client 22. As in step

- 15 -

316, the second benefit (not shown) may be a money payment or some other form of compensation. The value of the second benefit may also be calculated based on the value of transaction 28. Typically, the second benefit will have a lower value than the first benefit and the

5   difference in value between the first and second benefits provides a revenue stream for referral manager 16.

Method 300 then ends.

The result of method 300 is that an accredited client 22 is connected with a retained agent 54 who assists the accredited client 22

10   in completing transaction 28 with a third party 30. On completion of the transaction 28, the referral manager receives the first benefit and the accredited client receives the second benefit.

The preferred embodiment of referral system 10 has been described here with reference to a single computer 12. Referral system

15   10 may be operated in a distributed computing environment where the accredited client registry 34 and the accredited agent registry 40 are broken into sub-registries and stored on separate computers programmed to carry out methods 100, 200 and 300 for each sub-registry. The sub-registries may be divided based on the geographic

20   area in which the transaction 28 will take place.

As described above, the experience and qualifications of an accredited agent 36 are recorded in accredited agent registry 40. Over time, the experience and qualifications of an accredited agent 36 will change. Agent log-on page 45 of web site 14 allows an accredited agent

25   36 to periodically update information stored in accredited agent registry 40. Although the preferred embodiment described here allows for permanent accreditation of an accredited agent 36, in another embodiment, the accreditation of an accredited agent 36 may be suspended or cancelled if the accredited agent 36 does not periodically

30   update this information.

In another embodiment of the present invention, web site 14

may also include a "client log-on" page. This page would be accessible to an accredited client 22 to inquire into the status of the accredited client's account. For example, accredited client 22 may be able to find out whether any potential agents 42 have been notified about the
5   accredited agent's planned transaction 28 and, if so, how many of the potential agents 28 have identified themselves as interested agents 46.

The client log-on page may also allow an accredited client 22 to access a "client information" page, which contains further information. This information may relate to the process of
10 completing a transaction. For example, if the referral system of this alternative embodiment is also directed to connecting real estate clients and agents, then the further information may relate to mortgages, moving and storage companies, etc. The information may also relate more generally to legal and financial services which may be
15 of interest to real estate clients such as will preparation and investment management. Each accredited client 22 may have a different client information page on web site 14 and the referral manager 16 may select the contents of that page based on the geographic location of the accredited client 22 and the nature of the
20 transaction 28 the accredited client 18 wishes to undertake.

In another embodiment, the transactions that various accredited clients wish to undertake may be published on web site 14. Other persons (who may or may not be clients) may review the transactions and if they wish, they may apply to become accredited
25 clients for the purpose of being introduced to an accredited agent 36 who can assist them in investigating and completing the transaction.

The preferred embodiment has been described here with reference to real estate transactions. This invention may be used for other transactions in which the matching of accredited buyers/clients
30 with accredited sellers/agents is desirable, such as leasing and rental transactions and may be used in relation to any ware or service.

- 17 -

Other variations and embodiments of the present invention are also possible. All of these fall within the scope of the inventions, which, is limited only by the following claims.

- 18 -

I CLAIM:

1.   An internet based method for connecting an accredited client
and a retained agent, said accredited client intending to enter into a
transaction with a third party, said retained agent introducing said
accredited client to said third party to consummate said transaction,
the method comprising the steps of:

a)   providing a website accessible to a prospective client and a
plurality of prospective agents;

b)   accrediting said prospective client based upon a first
accreditation process and, after sucessful accreditation,
classifying said prospective client as said accredited client;

c)   accrediting each of said prospective agents based upon a
second accreditation process and, after successful
accreditation, classifying each of said prospective agents as an
accredited agent;

d)   matching said accredited client with a set of accredited agents;

e)   informing said accredited client of said set of accredited
agents;

f)   informing each of said accredited agents in said set of
accredited agents of said accredited client; and

g)   enabling said accredited client to select said retained agent
from said set of accredited agents.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein said first accreditation process verifies that said prospective client meets a plurality of requirements comprising: age, marital status, and financial status.

5

3. The method of claim 1 wherein said second accreditation process verifies that each of said prospective agents is experienced and qualified to assist said accredited client in consummating said transaction.

10

4. The method of claim 1 wherein said method further comprises the step of:

    h) upon consummation of said transaction, receiving a benefit
15   from said retained agent.

5. The method of claim 4 wherein said benefit is in the form of money.

20 6. The method of claim 1 wherein said benefit is shared between said referral manager and said accredited client.

7. The method of claim 1 wherein said transaction is selected from the group consisting of:

25

    a) real estate purchases;

    b) real estate sales;

30 c) real estate leases

- 20 -

d)   real estate rentals; and

e)   financial instruments, said financial instruments financing the purchase, sale or lease of said materials or services.

5

8.   A method for selling or purchasing wares or services via the internet, said method comprising the steps of:

a)   establishing an internet web site accessible to agents and
10   clients;

b)   accrediting an agent;

c)   accrediting a client;
15

d)   repeating steps b) and c) for each agent or client to be accredited;

e)   matching an accredited agent to an accredited client; and
20

f)   sharing of a benefit provided by said agent, between said client and a referral manger should said matching result in a sale or purchase.

25   9.   The method of claim 8 wherein said wares or services are selected from the group consisting of:

a)   real estate purchases;

30   b)   real estate sales;

c)   real estate leases;

d)   real estate rentals; and

5   e)   financial instruments, said financial instruments financing the purchase, sale or lease of said materials or services.

10.   The method of claim 8 wherein said referral fee is in the form of money.

10

11.   A computer based method for connecting a client with an agent, said client wishing to arrange a transaction, said agent wishing to introduce said client to a third party, said third party wishing to enter into said transaction with said client, the method comprising
15 the steps of:

a)   accrediting said client, if said client does not become an accredited client, the method does not proceed;

20 b)   selecting a set of referred agents from a database of accredited agents;

c)   notifying said set of referred agents and said accredited client of said transaction;

25

d)   contacting said set of agents and said accredited client to ascertain which agent in said set of agents is a retained agent;

e)   monitoring the status of said transaction until said
30   transaction is completed.

- 22 -

12.   The method of claim 11 wherein upon the completion of said transaction a referral manager receives from said retained agent a first benefit, said referral manager providing to said accredited client a second benefit.

5

13.   A computer based system for introducing an accredited client to a plurality of accredited agents, said system comprising:

a)   a database comprising a plurality of accredited agents

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b)   means for allowing an accredited client to submit a transaction;

c)   matching means for selecting from said database of said

15   plurality of accredited agents a set of interested agents based on the characteristics of said transaction;

d)   means for notifying said accredited client of said interested agents; and

20

e)   means for notifying each of said interested agents of said client and said transaction.

1/5

FIG.1

START

100

18

PROSPECTIVE
CLIENT 18 SUBMITS
CLIENT APPLICATION
FORM 26

102

18

REFERRED MANAGER 16
REVIEWS APPLICATION
AND ASSESSES VALIDITY

104

106

IS
PROSPECTIVE
CLIENT 18
ACCREDITED
?

NO

108

END

YES

110

ADD ACCREDITED
CLIENT 22 TO
ACCREDITED CLIENT
REGISTRY 34

34

END

FIG.2

3/5

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                          ┌─────────────┐
                          │    START    │
                          └─────────────┘
                                 │
                                 ▼
                         ╱─────────────────╲        200
  ┌──┐                  ╱  PROSPECTIVE       ╲
  └──┘  ─────────────▶ │   AGENT 20          │
  20                   │   SUBMITS AGENT      │
                       │   APPLICATION        │──202
                        ╲  FORM 38           ╱
                         ╲─────────────────╱
                                 │
                                 ▼
                       ┌───────────────────┐
                       │  REFERRED MANAGER │        ┌──┐
              204      │   16 ASSESSES     │◀────── └──┘
                       │  QUALIFICATIONS OF│         20
                       │ PROSPECTIVE AGENT 20│
                       └───────────────────┘
                                 │
                                 ▼
                           ╱─────────╲
              206         ╱    IS      ╲
                        ╱  PROSPECTIVE   ╲    NO        208
                       │   AGENT 20      │──────────┐
                        ╲  ACCREDITED   ╱           │
                         ╲─────────────╱            ▼
                                │              ┌─────────┐
                              YES              │   END   │
                                │              └─────────┘
                                ▼
                         ┌──────────────┐
                         │  ASSIGN ID   │
                         │  CODE AND    │──210
                         │  PASSWORD    │
                         └──────────────┘
                                │
                                ▼
                         ┌──────────────┐
                         │ ADD ACCREDITED│        40
                         │  AGENT 36 TO  │       ___
              212        │  ACCREDITED   │──────▶│   │
                         │ AGENT REGISTRY 40│     └───┘
                         └──────────────┘
                                │
                                ▼
                          ┌─────────┐
                          │   END   │
                          └─────────┘
```

FIG.3

SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

4/5

START
300

34

MAKE POTENTIAL
AGENT LIST 44
44
42

40

302

44

NOTIFY EVERY
POTENTIAL AGENT 42
ABOUT TRANS. 28
304
42

42

MAKE INTERESTED
AGENT LIST 48
306   48
46

ASSIGN A SCORE
TO EVERY INTERESTED
AGENT 46
308

48

48

MAKE REFERRED
AGENT LIST
310   52
54

312

NOTIFY ACCRED.
CLIENT 22 AND
REFERRED AGENTS
ABOUT ONE ANOTHER
22

54

A

FIG.4A

FIG.4B

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

	International application No.
	PCT/US00/32627

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) :G06F 17/60
US CL :705/26, 27, 1, 37

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 705/26, 27, 1, 37

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

NONE

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

WEST, DIALOG

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 5,664,115 A (FRASER) 02 September 1997, col. 4, line 6 thru col. 10, line 38.	1-13
A	US 5,754,850 A (JANSSEN) 19 May 1998, entire document.	1-13
A	US 5,857,174 A (DUGAN) 05 January 1999, entire document.	1-13

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.   ☐ See patent family annex.

*	Special categories of cited documents:	"T"	later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
"A"	document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance		
"E"	earlier document published on or after the international filing date	"X"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
"L"	document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"Y"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
"O"	document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means		
"P"	document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	"&"	document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
09 APRIL 2001	25 APR 2001

Name and mailing address of the ISA/US	Authorized officer
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Form PCT/ISA/210 (second sheet) (July 1998)★